

More Network Conscious Than Ever? Challenges, Strategies, and Analytic Labor of Users in the Facebook Environment

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As is widely observed, social network sites (SNS) constitute a new environment of interaction where users encounter various challenges that they usually do not encounter in other environments. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how users deal with the challenges in this unique environment, paying particular attention to the ways in which they examine and reflect on their social ties and networks. On the basis of 36 semistructured interviews with Facebook users, the article presents the hypothesis that participants of SNS develop a tendency to become highly observant and inquisitive about their networks and are frequently involved in an activity that the authors call analytic labor.

Key words: Social Networks, Social Network Sites, Facebook, Users, Self Presentation, Surveillance.

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Introduction

One widely shared observation in the literature on social network sites (SNS) is that such sites have a number of unique properties that differentiate them from offline environments.¹ As a result, the participants of SNS encounter various challenges as well as opportunities,² which they usually do not encounter in other environments. In this study, we aim to add one further observation to these findings: In trying to deal with the challenges they face in this new environment, users tend to examine their social ties and networks closely, and become increasingly involved in an activity that we will call “analytic labor.”

By this term, we refer to several distinct, albeit interrelated, sets of activities:

- (i) regular observation of other users with the aim of finding out about their networks and relationships;³
- (ii) classification and categorization of other users according to various criteria like their social background or patterns of online communication;
- (iii) evaluation and interpretation of online behavior of other users.

Although “analytic labor” is rather an unusual term, we ended up coining it for several reasons. First of all, we wanted to underline that these activities involved *effort*. More importantly, we wanted to distinguish them from the myriad of others such as sharing pictures, participating in interest groups, and so on. We could perhaps best explain our point here by saying that analytic labor is not simply one

of the many ways of using SNS, but rather, it is carried out *alongside* these different usages as the users analyze their environment *while they are using* SNS. We shall discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this concept in section 1.3.

1.1 Brief overview of literature and the main research interests of the study

Our major aim in initiating this study was to gather in-depth, qualitative information about how users experience the environment of SNS and cope with its challenges. During the pilot interviews, we noticed a striking tendency among informants, which seemed to have received little attention in previous research: They kept their networks under scrutiny, categorized the individuals in their lists, and were engaged in much reflection about their social ties. From this point onwards, the exploration of these activities, which we call “analytic labor,” became the central aim of our study. We then rearranged our interviews, adding three new thematic questions – Parts V, VI, and VII – to allow informants to talk more about this issue (see: Appendix I).

Empirically, the most important contribution of this study consists in bringing to attention the various types of analytic labor carried out by Facebook users. Although we did not derive this concept from the literature, our observations would not make much sense without an understanding of two other topics on which there has been considerable research: the *unique properties of SNS* and the *challenges faced by users*. Since we shall discuss this literature in Part 3, here we provide a brief overview, along with a list of our contributions.

Three unique properties of SNS were of special interest to our study. The first is that past social ties can be reactivated/maintained thanks to the capacities of Facebook (Ellison et al., 2007). However, there has been no sustained inquiry into the dynamics of this process. We address this gap by drawing attention to the ambiguous nature of such encounters and reflections carried out by users to deal with this ambiguity (Section 3.1).

Secondly, Facebook interface enables users to observe the activities of other users (Lewis & West, 2009; Muise et al., 2009; Raynes–Goldie, 2010; Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010). There has, however, been no in-depth study of this practice. In this study, we address that gap by providing a basic typology of the different ways in which users carry out such observations (Section 3.2).

Finally, different segments of a user’s network can be brought together on SNS, leading to the phenomenon of “collapsed contexts” (boyd, 2010; Debatin et al., 2009; Donath & boyd, 2004; Lampinen et al., 2009; Hogan, 2010; West et al., 2009). Moreover, these properties of SNS generate important challenges for users, either due to issues of privacy (boyd and Hargittai, 2010; Gross and Acquisti, 2005; Lewis et al., 2008b; Tufekci, 2008) or the difficulty of self presentation in an environment made of collapsed contexts (boyd, 2010; Debatin et al., 2009; Donath and boyd, 2004; Hogan, 2010; Lampinen et al., 2009). However, there are few studies that focus on how, in dealing with these challenges, users try to develop a sense of their audience by categorizing their Facebook friends and evaluating their online behavior – which is the most important point we aim to highlight with the concept of analytic labor (Section 3.3).

1.2 Theoretical background and contributions of the study

The key concept of this essay, analytic labor, is closely related to a fundamental theoretical insight in social sciences: social actors are not just passive objects of knowledge; they constantly try to make sense of their social environment through various mental schemes. This idea was first underlined by Max Weber (1949) and Alfred Schutz (1970), and subsequently adopted by a series of theoretical approaches – often subsumed under the broad rubric of social constructivism – including phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology. Critical social theorists such as Adorno (e.g. 1981) and, more recently, Bourdieu

(1990) also draw on this insight when they argue that the consciousness social actors have of their society condition their relation to that society.

For an important number of scholars adopting this perspective, conceptual schemes used in everyday life constitute a special area of interest (e.g. Goffman, 1959; Garfinkel, 1984; de Certeau, 1984). More recently, partly drawing on this literature, some scholars studied the use of the Internet in everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2005; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Among the numerous contributors to this theoretical lineage, Garfinkel's (1984) pioneering work on ethnomethodology is particularly useful here in highlighting the connection between this general approach and the concept of analytic labor. In this work, Garfinkel points out that although the use of analytic methods is usually associated with scholarly research, ordinary social actors too utilize lay methods and conceptual schemes in their everyday life interactions. This is also the main idea behind analytic labor.

The conceptual link between analytic labor and ethnomethodology (and, more generally, social constructivism), however, should be qualified in several respects. First, most above mentioned constructivist theories focus on everyday life contexts. Analytic labor, in contrast, becomes possible in the environment of SNS, which has a number of properties missing from everyday life environments. Not all theoretical insights derived from research on everyday life, therefore, might be applicable to analytic labor. We shall elaborate on this problem in Section 3.3.1, where we question the applicability of Goffman's theory about "presentation of self in everyday life" to SNS.

Secondly, while most social constructivist theories deal with social actors' representations *in general*, analytic labor is concerned with the representation of a rather *specific* object; namely, networks. It is, of course, not an unheard fact that people reflect on their networks. As scholars from diverse research traditions note, beginning with constructs like tribal genealogies, throughout history social actors have made use of various mental schemes to map out their social networks, often with the strategic aim of accessing certain resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Latour, 2005; McLean, 2007).

However, what we underline here is a point that was not observed in these previous inquiries: the environment constituted by SNS might entail an *unprecedented increase* in the use of such schemes, leading to what might be called an *enhanced form of "network consciousness."* Two further implications of this observation are worth mentioning.

First, one key argument in most constructivist and critical theories is that the taken for granted assumptions of social actors facilitate the reproduction of social order. This is because such assumptions, alternatively described by concepts like "common sense" (Garfinkel), "ideology" (Adorno), or "habitus" (Bourdieu), are supposed to naturalize the existing social order, restricting social actors' capacity to question it. In contrast, analytic labor implies an *increased inquisitiveness* about social networks. Conceptually, therefore, it highlights a novel possibility not foreseen by above mentioned theories, where inquisitiveness rather than naturalization tends to become a habitual attitude.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our findings might also have some significance for anticipating a potential development at the societal level. If the analytic labor triggered by the environment of SNS spread beyond this domain, there is the possibility that network consciousness might turn into a general trait in contemporary societies. We shall return to this point in the conclusion.

Methodological Remarks

Thematic Questions used in the Interviews

We conducted 36 semistructured, in-depth interviews. The interviews consisted of 8 different parts, each including one main thematic question and several additional questions (see: *Appendix I*).

During the interviews, informants were asked to comment on these questions with as little interruption as possible. However, if the informant's response was too brief or ambiguous, the interviewer could raise additional questions to have a more in-depth understanding of the informant's comments.

In designing our interviews, we tried our best to avoid directing the informants towards determinate types of answers and aimed to understand the indigenous forms of reflection used by them. Unlike questionnaire items in structured interviews, the *thematic questions* in this interview – e.g. “Can you tell us about your friends on Facebook?” – do not correspond to particular hypotheses. Rather, they are used to guide the flow of the interviews and allow our informants remain focused on three main topics: i.) unique characteristics of SNS; ii.) challenges and the strategies of users; and iii.) analytic labor performed by users.

Informants

The informants in this study were recruited from second-degree contacts (acquaintances of acquaintances). Interviewers and informants had no previous knowledge of each other prior to the interviews. We adopted this procedure partly in light of recent research on the merits of different recruitment methods (see, for example, McLean and Campbell, 2010). In comparison to anonymously recruited informants, contacts with a personal referral are more likely to trust the interviewers (which was an essential requirement for our study); and yet, with such informants, it is still possible to sustain a high level of personal distance and objectivity both during interviews and analysis of interview material.

As in most research based on in-depth interviews with a small number of informants, selection was not done randomly. We aimed to interview people with diverse backgrounds, especially with respect to age and occupation.⁴ Our informants show considerable variation in terms of age (18–55; Mean: 26)⁵ and occupation (including, in addition to eight undergraduate and eight graduate students, two housewives, one manual laborer, one technical drawer, three low-level government employees, two technicians, three managers, one office worker (private sector), one businessman, one engineer, three journalists, and two teachers).

The interviews were carried out in Turkey – a country with the fourth largest number of users in the world, according to official statistics of Facebook.⁶ The ratio of Internet users to the total population in Turkey has increased rapidly in recent years, from 30.1% in 2007 to 41.6% in 2010,⁷ although this is still lower than the ratio of users in the U.S. and Western Europe.⁸ Also, in comparison to the U.S., a lower percentage of Facebook users in Turkey are women (56.4 % versus 35.8 %)⁹. Such differences notwithstanding, there is no statistical evidence of Turkish users constituting an anomaly in the global context.¹⁰

The Facebook Environment: Challenges, Strategies, and Analytic Labor

We present our findings in three sections. In each section, we highlight *one specific example of analytic labor* in response to the challenges generated by *one unique property of Facebook environment* (see: Appendix II).

A first example of analytic labor: Users' reflections about old friendships

One major characteristic that makes Facebook environment unique concerns the use of the website for re-initiating contact with old friends, which entails that *dormant relations from the past* are transformed into *visible relations in the present*. Although it has long been pointed out that Internet can provide opportunities for keeping in touch with friends who moved to a new location (Hampton & Wellman, 2002), Facebook's capacities in this respect seem to surpass all previous channels (Ellison et al., 2007).

We devoted one section of our interview to this topic. The overall scenario we observed was approximately as follows. Almost all our informants (35/36) sought – or themselves were contacted by – their old friends through Facebook. Many (27/36) of them ended up meeting with some of these old friends in person. The outcome of these meetings, however, was not always a success story. For the great majority, after a few gatherings, the initial excitement receded. Some informants reported that they continued to communicate with a few, but not with most, of these old friends. Nevertheless, most old friends, once contacted, remained in friend lists.

We wanted to delve into the background of this scenario and capture the experience of users by observing the dynamics in the reactivation of old friendships that go years back in time. Thus, unlike most studies on Facebook that exclusively use college students, we included many elder users.¹¹ We believe, mainly due to this extension, our interviews reveal an ambivalent attitude that is not observed in previous studies.

On the one hand, almost all informants maintained that old friendships have a unique place in their lives. In particular, they noted the lasting effects of sharing something in common at a special period in their lives, stressing the difficulty of forming intimate friendship bonds in later ages. On the other hand, the special value attributed to old friendships was overshadowed by a kind of skepticism about effects of time. Both prior to and in the aftermath of encounters with old friends, informants were highly conscious about the changes in their own and their friends' lives.

One possible explanation for this ambivalent attitude might be that on Facebook, temporal distinctions about the past and present, which are more easily sustained in everyday life relations,¹² are partly blurred. But the most important point for our concerns was that such encounters triggered in the informants a host of reflections about the nature of friendship and effects of time. For example:

Twenty five years since we have not seen each other . . . then thirty years later, it's suddenly my dearest pal, etc. We hug each other . . . I don't know the reason . . . I observed the same in my wife . . . Maybe it has something to do with age . . . (M, 51, Teacher).

While such general reflections were more common among elder users, informants from all age groups seemed to be concerned with a second question about what kind of a *value* a reestablished contact with an old friend constituted. They evaluated old friendships according to three distinct value orientations. Sometimes these relations were portrayed as “scarce commodities” in modern society because they involved a shared history and survived the test of time. At other times, especially in the aftermath of disappointing meetings, they were interpreted in instrumental terms, as potential sources of social/material benefits. Finally, sometimes informants characterized these relations as something to be enjoyed and experienced for their own sake.¹³

It is worth noting that these distinct types of evaluation were not mutually exclusive and could often be observed in the narrative of the same informant. Here are two examples:

. . . I'm thinking about the simplicity of sharing things at that time [i.e. in the past] . . . but when you look at it today . . . the relationships we know are relationships within the confines of an institution [workplace and university]. By now, we have already made our choices. . . . Maybe [those past relations] are more innocent, less based on expectations, but of course, . . . when you look at it at the end of the day, there are moments you realize that you strayed away a lot from your friends in primary or high school. There, after that point, they remain merely as people in the list. (M, 24, Undergraduate).

In this first example, one can easily note that the informant portrays old friendships in two distinct ways: first, as a “strong tie” between people without any instrumental expectations, and secondly, more as a “weak tie,” as “people in the list.” A second informant provided a more extended typology that, among others, included an esthetic/sentimental criterion, which corresponds to the third type we mentioned above:

I believe this [i.e. contacting old friends] might have sentimental reasons. ‘Ah! Let me remember the old days, let me go back to those days,’ it could be this, or you might think that people from the past know you better. . . . Another reason might be . . . what did he do, what he has been up to . . . let me not sever the ties, it is impolite towards that person, that may be another reason. Yet another reason might be because of work and economic reasons . . . (W, 27, Graduate student).

Informants often used these different types of criteria to make sense of their encounters with old friends. This analytic labor was largely facilitated by technical capabilities of Facebook. Users could see their past ties as part of the overall map of their present social network. In that map, they could identify some relationships that worked and could be reactivated as a friendship tie; then there were others that did not work so well, so they were delegated to the category of weak ties; and, finally, in a few cases, it would be best to disregard them completely: “if these were meaningful relations, they would not have ended . . .” (W, 21, Undergraduate). Already at this stage, then, our informants were carrying out an amateurish analysis of their social ties and networks. Below, we will encounter further examples.

Second example of “analytic labor”: Systematic observation of other users

That Facebook users engage in the observation of other users’ activities is mentioned in a number of studies. Raynes–Goldie (2010) gives several examples of how some of her informants “repurpose Facebook’s design to violate the privacy of others.” Similarly, Muise et al. (2009, p. 443) note that “Facebook gives people access to information about their partner that would not otherwise be accessible” and argue that this leads to increased feelings of jealousy.

We should not, however, conclude on the basis of these findings that this is an exceptional practice. Data from other studies (Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010) and our own interviews indicate that observing other users’ activities is a much more widespread practice than it first appears. Furthermore, there is evidence that such observations are not carried out randomly. Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield (2010, p. 1558) note that when they asked, “how many Facebook profiles . . . [their informants] had looked at in the past week. The mean answer, 6.4 (SD=9.3, 0|100) indicated that profile-viewing attention is focused primarily on a subset of the friend network.” Our informants’ comments also indicate that, when they make observations, they are focused on a select group of users. This is quite remarkable since it implies that users carry out these activities in a conscious and systematic manner.

Interview reports indicate that the practice of observing others takes different forms and is performed with *specific intentions*. We were able to identify three major types of observation, which can be analyzed in terms of three basic variables: whether they are oriented towards present, future, or past relations; whether they target specific individuals or groups; and, whether they focus on weak or strong social ties. Let us look into each type closely.

Type 1 - "Checking Special Cases": The target here is specific individuals and weak ties. It can be oriented towards both past and future relations. The most common version of the former was users' inquiries about old friends:

I mean, how many kids does he have for example, or where is he working, . . . last time we were together, it was at the technical school. (M, 42, Technician).

I was very curious about what my old friends, I mean, my primary school friends were doing, like, who is where, what are they doing, are they studying? Have they finished school? Are they married, where do they live? For example, I learned that a friend of mine passed away. A friend from high school. (W, 22, Journalist).

There were also future oriented observations of this kind. Some users observed potential candidates that could be included in their friend lists: "I am making him wait in the waiting list . . . I am watching him closely . . . I might accept him in the future" (W, 37, Housewife). Others were interested in gathering *more* information about people whom they vaguely knew at present; to paraphrase a statement we heard in many interviews: "I do not look at everyone's page. But if I notice an interesting person, I try to find out more about him/her." Another informant described the following future oriented use:

I think what makes Facebook to stand one step above other communication means is that in addition to communicating, two parties can follow each other's activities . . . It is a bit like this . . . take this guy, he has a conservative disposition, takes a look at the pictures [of a girl] . . . and, to put it bluntly, [he sees that] there is no 'fault.' Aha, he says, this is my kind of girl. (M, 20, Undergraduate).

Type 2 - "Keeping in Touch With the Group": Unlike the previous type, this one is present-oriented and targets groups. Sometimes, the group observed is more or less identical with the user's social connections on Facebook: "Frankly, I check it everyday. I mean, like, regardless of whether I have work to do or not. Who's done what, where, and so on (laughing). Every evening I look at it this way and then I turn it off and do other stuff." (W, 26, Technical drawer). Some users, however, carried out these observations to keep in touch with more specific groups, particularly with friends and relatives in other cities. "I mean, because I am away from [name of hometown], I cannot see my friends . . . where are they working, what are they doing, I mean, how old are their kids, how many kids they have, this is the kind of stuff I see there." (M, 42, Technician). The best visual imagery with respect to these types of observations was provided by a female restaurant manager in her mid-50s: "I watch the children grow." Another noteworthy comment was made by a male graduate student (25) who viewed his friend list like a microcosm of his society at large:

They are very different people in the end . . . Therefore, you understand what is on the agenda for a right wing person, or what is on the agenda for a left wing person . . . I mean it's like you follow things from one newspaper and it is very one sided . . . But because on Facebook everybody shares what they see as important, it is more pluralistic. . . . I mean they are like . . . like a sample to me right now . . . like a sample of society.

Type 3 - "Scrutinizing Significant Others": Although, like the first, this one also targets individuals, and like the second, it is present-oriented, this type is exclusively oriented towards strong ties. The most

common form here is scrutinizing the interactions of a romantic partner (see also: Lewis & West, 2009; Muise et al., 2009). Alternatively, such scrutiny might also be carried out by parents. Here is how a female teacher in her mid-40s narrates her reasons for joining Facebook:

I have a twelve-year old son. This year, he joined Facebook because all his friends are on Facebook . . . So, I need to keep an eye on him because on Facebook one can get all sorts of different mail, invitations for friendship and so on . . . Frankly, you need to keep this under control.

There is, however, one characteristic common to all the types discussed above: The aim of these observations is not merely to gather “personal information” about other individuals but also to scrutinize the relationships *between* individuals. The interview material indicates that, in addition to the friend lists that give a glimpse of a user’s social network, photos, and comments posted on Facebook can provide much information about a user’s relation to others. Several informants noted how, from a photograph, one could learn not only where, when and with whom a user was, but also the more intimate details of what they were doing. Similarly, comments on a user’s wall were read to discover the nature of the relationship between the user and writers.

Finally, it might be worth noting that, although observing other people in everyday life contexts is not an unusual activity, this rarely reaches to the same level of systematicity as in SNS. Conversely, “sampling” a specific subgroup in the population and systematically observing them is a typical activity in some professions. One notable case here is of course sociologists, whom Berger (1963) once famously characterized as “professional peeping-Toms.” Facebook users seem to fall somewhere between these two extremes, though, perhaps, they are closer to sociologists to the extent that they too take “samples” of their group and regularly observe them.

Facebook users, however, are different from sociologists in at least two respects. First, although being able to observe others was rather appealing to most users, they also felt quite uneasy, even slightly guilty, about this: “I mean, well, this is curiosity. I can’t say I didn’t do it. I am doing it. Everybody is doing it too (laughter)” (W, 32, Sanitation worker). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, users were overly conscious about the fact that they themselves could be objects of observation:

I see Facebook as a kind of “Somebody is Watching Us” episode;¹⁴ . . . Everybody joins it out of curiosity about others’ private affairs . . . and I too get caught up in such curiosity sometimes . . . After all, this is one of the biggest reasons why it is so successful . . . To see what other people are doing. (W, 55, Manager).

In fact, some users seemed to utilize the knowledge they gained from observing others reflexively, when they strategically displayed their own activities to others:

If there is someone I was very close to once and if nowadays things are not so good between us, then . . . you can do something like showing him that here I’m going on with my life fine . . . And, he will be watching this at this time, and I am able to do something which I cannot do in normal life, like showing/marketing myself to other people . . . I know what is going on between a friend of mine whom I knew when I was in the ninth grade and her present boyfriend . . . (W, 21, Undergraduate).

As these last two comments suggest, being observed by other users is the counterpart of being able to observe them. Indeed, users often carry out such observations with the aim of *finding out more about their own observers*. This is what we turn to in the next section.

Third example of analytic labor: Classifying and evaluating other users

The problem of collapsed contexts

Recent research have revealed that Facebook users are often less concerned about being observed by complete outsiders than by people in their own social circle (Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010; West et al., 2009). While similar concerns might also arise in offline environments, they are experienced more acutely on Facebook due to a unique property of the website: Heterogeneous segments of a user's network can be combined together in the same "list" and the user's interactions with these different segments become potentially visible to others. To use boyd's (2010) terminology, on Facebook, different contexts of interaction tend to "collapse" into a single environment.

As a result, users face several challenges that they seldom encounter in offline environments. One such challenge concerns the risks involved in blending social ties from the past and the present in the same list. As one informant put it bluntly, "there are certain things you do not want to share [about your past]" (M, 26, Graduate student). Similarly, a second challenge stems from lumping together social ties of varying strength (Donath & boyd, 2004; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Spencer & Pahl, 2006; West et al., 2009) – e.g., when formal acquaintances from the workplace are included in the same list along with best friends. The following comment reveals the nature of these challenges in the context of generational differences:

Now, if it's a very close relative, for example, a cousin or a brother . . . In that case, you can treat them like a friend. But, you know, [if the person is] an uncle or an aunt, then because of generation difference, they have more traditional attitudes. They might find your frivolousness . . . [on Facebook] weird . . . Because normally you do not show them that face of yours and we have masks we put on in society. (W, 27, Graduate student).

One general problem users encounter in collapsed contexts, then, is the difficulty of deciding which "face" of their self to display (Debatin et al., 2009; Donath and boyd, 2004; Lampinen et al., 2009).¹⁵ This problem is inseparable from another, which is, in a way, its flip-side: the difficulty of assessing the expectations of the audience to which the self is being presented (boyd, 2010; Hogan, 2010). In most everyday life contexts, it is possible for individuals to interact with *different circles* of their network in *different places* and at *different times*. In each interaction, therefore, individuals have a rather distinct sense of their audience. However, when these different circles are included in one list, the characteristics of the audience become ambiguous, making it difficult to decide which self-expression one should display.¹⁶

As we shall soon see, most of the analytic labor performed by users aim to tackle this problem. Before proceeding further, however, a brief conceptual clarification might be necessary. As is well known, Goffman's theory (1959) about "presentation of self" is central to many studies dealing with online identity formation on SNS, where information disclosed by users (about their tastes, political opinions, lifestyle, and so on) is conceptualized as socially significant identity expressions (Lewis et al., 2008a; Livingstone, 2008; Tufekci, 2008). In fact, sometimes, even information about the social ties of a user is also conceptualized similarly (Donath and boyd, 2004; Utz, 2010; Tong et al., 2008). However, it is important to note that the *presentation of self in an environment made of collapsed contexts* might

require more complex forms of reflection – more “analytic labor” – than the cognitive processes that Goffman (1959) observes in such cases where an actor usually tries to tailor his/her self-expression in reference to a single set of expectations.¹⁷ In fact, Goffman (1951, p. 296) himself recognizes that “in situations where complex social judgments are required, the exact social position of a person is obscured and, in a sense, replaced by a margin of dissensus and doubt.” We shall return to this point.

The Facebook users we interviewed were aware of above mentioned challenges. Yet, none of them expressed a strong disappointment. Here we tend to agree with Lampinen et al. (2009, 289) that this is mainly “due to successful use of the proactive management strategies.” Since this is an amply discussed topic in the literature, we shall not reproduce a list of these strategies here (Donath and boyd, 2004; Hogan, 2010; Lampinen et al., 2009; Raynes–Goldie, 2010; Stutzman & Kramer-Duffield, 2010; Tufekci, 2008). Instead, we will focus on how, as a prerequisite of strategy formation, users perform various types of analytic labor to develop a sense of their audience.

Developing a sense of the audience: classifications of people in the friend list

The most basic form of analytic labor we observed was users’ attempts to develop a map of their lists by classifying their Facebook friends. Here are a few examples:

Now, I can say it this way. Like, it might not be very possible to say it in percentages but approximately 10% or 15% are relatives. A large portion are people I studied with at primary school, high school, university . . . Beyond these are people I share similar viewpoints. (M, 24, Graduate student).

Actually, most friends I feel close to are not active on Facebook . . . I mean people who populate my Facebook page are like . . . if I grade the level of intimacy from 1 to 4 . . . they would stay at 2 and 3. Neither people I am very close to, nor people I am not close to populate my Facebook page. (M, 25, Graduate student).

I mean it’s a bit like this. I have some extreme friends. But if I have to make a general distribution, let me say it this way. You know, there is a curve like this. In the middle of that curve there are mostly master’s and doctoral students . . . people with a definite level of education . . . In the edges, there are friends from primary or high school. These are few in number. They too have some education. There are then a few foreigners . . . (W, 27, Graduate student).

Examples can be multiplied. What we need to emphasize here, however, is that in each classification above, different dimensions (kinship, intimacy, education) are used and blended in different ways. These classifications, therefore, have a different nature than those observed in some previous studies, which consist of relatively fixed categories (Lampinen et al., 2009). They are not abstract generalizations about categories of people. Rather, *each user tends to tailor the categories in these classifications somewhat differently*. This is how, for example, a student informant who was actively engaged in a political organization classified his list:

I mean, there are friends who are apolitical, but in terms of education, [they are] studying in the same department as me. There are friends who do not have the same education as me but who have the same political views . . . Beyond these there are friends who have nothing in common with me in terms of politics or education but whom I know for other reasons. (M, 20, Undergraduate).

The crucial point is that these categories reflect the user's main concerns (politics, education) while managing his interactions with the unique conglomeration of individuals in his friend list. In other words, these classifications function as a kind of analytic grid for the users to develop a sense of their audience, allowing them to become more conscious of their network and their own position in it.

3.3.3 *Analyzing and evaluating online behavior of other users*

Our informants also mentioned a number of general criteria that they used in making selections for their lists. The first was the degree of acquaintance. For some, political views also mattered, especially if they were expressed strongly – although many reported that their lists included friends with different political views. Another criterion, especially for users working in a profession, was whether there existed a formal status difference between them and the “candidate” (as in the case of a teacher who did not accept students to her list). Interview material suggests that the way in which users develop these criteria is influenced by their online activities and social background. For example, the importance attributed to degree of acquaintance seemed to vary negatively with previous Internet experience. Similarly, sensitivity to political views vary depending on informants' engagement in politics. A full exploration of these relationships, however, is beyond the scope of this study since our primary objective is to investigate widespread practices rather than differences.

In addition to the above criteria, all informants cared about what might be called the “Facebook behavior” of other users, which they mainly evaluated in relation to what kind of information a user discloses on the website and how. In this context, four distinct criteria were mentioned.

The first concerns the *frequency* with which a user posts information (comments, news, pictures, etc.). The main question here is how talkative or passive/quiet a user is. A second criterion concerned *how private the content of information* that was being posted. Informants often made reference to “some users” who posted irrelevant details about their private lives, which they often described as annoying. A third important criterion was the *manner* in which a user interacted on Facebook. This is essentially an *ethical* criterion used for evaluating to what extent a user cares about not disturbing others. Typically emphasized issues included how emotional a given user was when making comments to others and whether his/her comments involved aggression or “fanaticism.” Finally, a fourth criterion was related to the *intentions* of users; that is, whether a participant used Facebook for sociability or for instrumental reasons such as advertising his/her business.

Beyond its empirical significance, the utilization of such criteria for evaluating online behavior of others also has important theoretical implications. First, it means that even if the users try – as is often suggested in the literature – to form an online identity, they do this on the basis of a *comparative* analysis: Their self-presentation is performed according to a mental scheme consisting of multiple categories of user identities. Typically, they expressed this in statements like, “I am such and such a user, I post these kinds of comments, I do not do what some others do,” and so on:

I mean, one thing that strikes me is ... for example ... I had some friends from high-school whom I met on Facebook ... some of them share too much of their private lives. On Facebook I post photos too but I post ... photos of the city and things like that. I mean some of them are like ... they are living their lives on Facebook ... There he puts the pictures of where he has been last night ... there he says, there I was last night ... right away, the next day, they make comments, they talk about last night ... I never do this. (M, 26, Government employee).

Furthermore, although to an *external observer* SNS might appear as sites of exhibition rather than performance – because the stuff users post on SNS have the characteristics of an “artifact” rather than an “action” (Hogan, 2010) – such comparisons indicate that for the *observing users*, the *manner* in which an *observed user displays* information is interpreted as performance. In fact, when prompted further about this issue, some informants provided rather interesting, albeit improvisatory, classifications of “Facebook performances”:

Some use it like a therapy group; some use it to spread their views; some truly do it for friendship purposes and for having fun; some use it to enlarge their social circle . . . for some, being accepted or rejected as a friend is a matter of life and death . . . (W, 47, Teacher).

To summarize, all this indicates that, in trying to make sense of their audience, participants utilize various kinds of *norms and criteria* about user behaviors on Facebook. Moreover, through these criteria, they *classify* other users and try to *explain* or *interpret* their behavior.

Finally, let us note that sometimes these interpretations take the form of a general skepticism about the authenticity of online behavior:

I’m thinking that through Facebook people’s capacity for creativity and humor increases because they reflect way too much to make comments and status changes and so on. . . . I mean, because it is something everybody sees, maybe it is done with more thought . . . (W, 30, Manager).

It may be that unrealistic self-presentations are more difficult on SNS due to the presence of offline acquaintances (Utz, 2010). Nevertheless, in a similar fashion to scholars who underline the constructed nature of self representations in online environments (Ellison et al., 2006; Turkle, 1997; Walther, 1996), our informants kept on stressing that Facebook was different from the “real world”:

Sometimes it appears as if you are very intimate . . . I mean, in reality, if I come together with him and sit in a café, I know I won’t be so successful in that conversation. . . . There [on Facebook], you can behave towards him, how should I say, unlike what you are in reality . . . (M, 26, Government employee).

Thus, while, as Goffman (1959) observed, social actors might be routinely engaged in modifying their self-expressions in everyday life, the users we interviewed seemed to be all the more acutely aware of the ubiquity of this practice in Facebook environment. At this stage, however, it might be best to leave it as an open question whether this awareness might add a critical dimension to the analytic labor of users in the long run.

Conclusion

In concluding, we would like to specifically dwell on the potential social implications of our findings, which we could only briefly hint at above.

Academic researchers have long recognized that SNS constitute a unique data source for learning and thinking about networks (Lewis et al., 2008a). Partly drawing on Foucault (1977), some researchers have further argued that SNS might also be used for purposes of surveillance by government agencies (Katz and Rice, 2002, 272). So far, however, little attention has been paid to the question of whether and to what extent users themselves participate in such activities.

Our findings suggest that the privilege of obtaining and analyzing network related information available in SNS should be extended beyond academia and governments to users as well. More importantly, these findings also indicate that users' engagement in such practices might not be a rare occurrence. If it were so, we could perhaps consider it an ordinary fact since some basic form of network consciousness exists probably in all human groups. However, our observations point to a rather unprecedented tendency among users of SNS to become highly inquisitive and observant about their networks and social ties. In light of this tendency, we believe it is possible to hypothesize that, in the environment constituted by SNS, an enhanced form of network consciousness might be in the process of formation.

The developments we underlined so far mainly apply to SNS. However, we have at least three reasons to think that they might not remain limited to this environment. First, in recent years, there has been an almost exponential rise in the number of the participants of SNS globally and this trend seems to continue at present. Participation in SNS, therefore, can hardly be considered as a marginal experience in most contemporary societies.

Secondly, online and offline environments are not separated from each other in any absolute sense. As is often pointed out, they supplement and influence each other in multiple ways (Hampton and Wellman, 2003). This is all the more the case for SNS, not only because the networks maintained on those sites are generated from offline networks (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Lampinen et al., 2009; Mayer & Puller, 2008), but also because things that happen in SNS are often discussed in offline contexts.

Finally, it is a widely shared observation in social science literature that modern societies have long been evolving into "network societies." Networks, therefore, are already quite familiar objects *also* in offline contexts and their importance seems to grow, especially as practices like "networking" gain an increasing significance in everyday lives of contemporary social actors. The suggestion then is close to hand that there is already much motivation in offline environments for social actors to reflect on their networks, which might in fact be one of the underlying reasons for the growing popularity of SNS.

In light of these observations, it might not be implausible to hypothesize that the developments taking place in the environment of SNS are likely to spread beyond this domain such that the enhanced network consciousness that seems to be forming in this environment might lay the seeds of a network conscious society. Such a proposition, of course, can gain a precise form only through future research. Nevertheless, at this stage, it can be worth raising the question of whether people in contemporary societies will tend to become more network conscious than ever before.

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Notes

- 1 For overviews, see: boyd & Ellison (2007); Papacharissi (2010).
- 2 Although, to avoid wordiness, throughout the text we refer mainly to challenges, SNS also present numerous new possibilities. In fact, the two are quite inseparable since, as we describe in Part 3, these new possibilities often create problematic situations for users.
- 3 Although observation as such is not necessarily an analytic process, it is doubly related to the analytic labor of users. Analytic operations like classifications build on observations. In return, observations require that users have a sense of what/who constitutes a relevant object of observation.

- 4 Our group includes 17 women and 19 men; 11 married (6 women, 5 men) and 25 single (11 women, 14 men) informants.
- 5 The distribution of our informants in terms of age categories is as follows: 18–24: 13 informants; 25–35: 16 informants; 36–55: 7 informants.
- 6 Retrieved January 18, 2011 from <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>
- 7 Information and Communication Technology Usage Survey In Households and Individuals 2010, Turkish Statistics Institute, Press Release, 148. Retrieved September 18, 2010 from www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=6308
- 8 According to Pew Research Center, 75% of Americans used the Internet in 2008. Retrieved September 25, 2010 from <http://pewresearch.org/databank/keytrends/>
- 9 Retrieved September 25, 2010 from <http://www.checkfacebook.com/>
- 10 For further statistical information, see: www.checkfacebook.com
- 11 20 of our informants are over 22 years of age, 6 of whom are over 40.
- 12 For a discussion of temporal distinctions in everyday life, see: Karakayali (2005).
- 13 In more technical terms, it can be argued that the first type of evaluation treats old friendships as “bonding social capital,” the second as “bridging social capital,” and the third is reminiscent of Simmel’s (1971) concept of “sociability,” based on the observation that some social interactions have no further aim than the interaction itself.
- 14 An allusion to a popular reality show series on a Turkish TV channel.
- 15 In this sense, Facebook seems to constitute an exception to Turkle’s (1997) observation that Internet can facilitate the experience of multiple subjectivities.
- 16 Recently, a new feature is added to Facebook interface, which enables the users to assign their friends to different categories with different degrees of access to information. This feature did not exist when we first started this study, although users could adopt similar strategies such as creating different lists for different groups of “friends” or using aliases (Raynes-Goldie, 2010). It is likely that the addition of this feature will influence user strategies. But it does not necessarily eliminate the problem of collapsed contexts. Rather, this feature seems to presuppose that problem; it seems to be implemented to help users to overcome the problematic situations associated with collapsed contexts. More importantly, the addition of this feature does not necessarily diminish the analytic labor of users. If anything, it would probably encourage further reflection about networks and social ties, as the users who utilize this feature have to decide whom to include in which list and how to adjust the degrees of access.
- 17 For a list of other studies using Goffman, see: Hogan (2010).

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Appendix I:

Table A1 Interview Questions

PARTS	THEMATIC QUESTIONS	ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS
I: Introduction	How did you first become acquainted with Facebook?	Did you have any particular expectations when you first joined Facebook?
II: Current Activities	Could you tell us a little bit about your current Facebook activities?	- How often do you use Facebook?- Which functions of Facebook do you use most? - Have you made any changes to your profile and security settings since you became a member?
III: Unique properties of SNS	1. In terms of your social relations, are there things that you can do on Facebook that you cannot do in other contexts? 2. Do you think that your participation on Facebook has an impact on your everyday life?	
IV: Challenges and Strategies	Thematic questions in this part were implemented in two stages:1. Is there anything that you don't like about participating in Facebook? Do you experience any problems or difficulties? ... 2. So, what do you do about it [those problems that bother you, etc.]?	- Potential follow-up questions:- Have you ever blocked or deleted any people from your list? -- When there are things you only want to share with certain friends in your list, what do you do?

Table A1 (Continued)

PARTS	THEMATIC QUESTIONS	ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS
V: Facebook friends	Could you tell us a little bit about your Facebook friends?	- How many friends do you have in your list?- Do you share your private life with all your Facebook-friends? - Do you see any particular similarities between you and your Facebook-friends? - Are there any people in your list with whom you have never communicated? - Do you include your relatives/colleagues in your list? - - Are there people in your list who do not know each other?
VI: Views about friendship.	What does “friendship” mean to you?	- Are there any specific criteria you use in selecting your friends?- In what ways do you think friendship and kinship are different? - - If we asked you to compare friendship on Facebook and in everyday life . . . Are they similar or different?
VII: Observation	“Do you sometimes check other users’ pages or observe their activities?” If yes, or already mentioned: “Could you tell us a little bit more about these observations?”	- What is it that you find most interesting about such observations?- Do you have any special reasons to make such observations? - Are there any specific people you observe regularly? - - How do you feel about making such observations?
VIII: Contacting old friends.	“Have you ever had any contact with your old friends through Facebook?” If already mentioned: “Could you please tell us a little bit more about these encounters?”	- “Have you met face-to-face with those old friends after contacting them through Facebook?” If yes: “How did these meetings go?”- - Do you still continue communicating with these old friends?
Final Remarks	- Is there anything you would like to add to your earlier points, especially regarding the most positive/negative aspects of participating in Facebook?- What do you think would change, if you quit Facebook now?	

Appendix II:

Table A2 Types Of Analytic Labor

MAIN TYPES	SUB-TYPES	PROPERTIES (MAIN CRITERIA or TARGETS)
1. OBSERVATION	1A. "Checking special cases"	Weak ties; individuals.
	1B. "Keeping in touch with the group"	Weak ties; groups.
	1C. "Scrutinizing significant others"	Strong ties; individuals.
2. CLASSIFICATION AND CATEGORIZATION	2A. Categorization of old friendships.	- As strong ties.- As weak ties. - - As relationships to be enjoyed on their own.
	2B. Classification of people in "friend-lists".	Each user tailors the categories in these classifications differently. Most commonly used criteria:- Degree of acquaintance. - Degree of involvement in politics. - Degree of similarity in terms of education and lifestyle. - - Professional status.
	2C. Categorization of users according to their online behavior.	Most commonly used criteria:- Frequency of posting information. - Level of privacy of the information posted. - Degree of thoughtfulness towards others. - - Intention: sociability or instrumentality?
3. EVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION	3A. Evaluation of old friends.	See: 2A
	3B. Interpretation of online behavior of other users.	In addition to the criteria used in 2C, users also paid attention to the following:- Protection of privacy; how reckless is the user? - - Number of friends; is the user pretentious?
	3C. Critical evaluation of the authenticity of online behavior.	To what extent is a user modifying his/her self-expression on SNS.